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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: GOJ AND ISLAMISTS TRADE BARBS ON ARREST OF MPS FOR
GLORIFYING ZARQAWI

REF: A. AMMAN 4396
[1](#)B. AMMAN 4245

Classified By: CDA Daniel Rubinstein for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite some vigorous prodding, Jordanian Islamists have to date refused to apologize for the four Islamic Action Front (IAF) MPs detained for allegedly glorifying deceased terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. King Abdullah and GOJ officials continue to defend the arrest of the MPs, and have rejected criticism from human rights groups. A recent poll found that 59% of Jordanians consider Zarqawi to have been a "terrorist," but contacts caution against reading too much into the numbers. Given that hundreds, or perhaps even thousands, of people visited the Zarqawi family condolence tent) including other MPs - the GOJ will have a difficult time making charges stick against three of the arrested MPs who reportedly did not make any public statements praising Zarqawi. END SUMMARY.

ISLAMISTS HOLD THEIR GROUND

[1](#)2. (U) Press editorials and individual members of Parliament continue to call on the IAF to apologize for the actions of the four IAF MPs arrested for paying a condolence call on Zarqawi's family and) in the case of MP Mohammad Abu Fares) allegedly praising Zarqawi as a "martyr" and "freedom fighter" (refs A, B). The IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood, however, have adamantly refused to comply. IAF Secretary-General Zaki Bani Irsheid told daily Al Arab Al

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Yawm, "We shall not apologize. It may easier for (the IAF's critics) to touch the stars in the sky than to hear an apology from us." He added that while the remarks made by MP Abu Fares were "unacceptable and unfortunate," it was "absolutely impossible" for the IAF to "condemn the resistance."

[1](#)3. (U) Sheikh Salam al-Falahat, Controller-General of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), similarly defended the MPs' condolence call in the press. Declaring that "there is nothing for which to apologize," he repeated claims that the GOJ was attempting to discredit the Islamist movement. "Dragging our deputies to prison for no fault of their own amounts to a message addressed to us, and not just to the deputies themselves," he stated. IAF Spokesman Jamil Abu Baker said that Abu Fares might have been censured by the IAF if the government had refrained from immediately launching a campaign against the Islamist movement. Several IAF and MB members have complained publicly that the GOJ has refused to let them visit the detained MPs in prison.

[1](#)4. (U) The arrest of the four MPs has drawn a negative response from human rights organizations. U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a statement June 17 criticizing the GOJ's actions against the Islamist legislators. "Expressing condolences to the family of a dead man, however murderous he

might be, is not a crime," stated Sarah Leah Whitson, director of HRW's Middle East and North Africa division. Whitson added that the alleged comments by MP Abu Fares should not be considered "incitement to violence." Hani Dahleh, head of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, called on the GOJ to "immediately release the MPs who have done nothing wrong."

KING AND GOJ STAND FIRM, DENY CAMPAIGN AGAINST IAF

15. (U) In an interview with German magazine Der Spiegel, King Abdullah defended the GOJ position. When asked if the four arrested MPs had crossed "redlines," the King responded, "I don't think there should be any tolerance to people that incite and support terrorism in any form." The King further stated that leaders of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood "have been working in a gray area for the past decades" and needed to "redefine their relationship" with the GOJ and Jordanian people. On a more conciliatory note, the King said that the "overwhelming majority" within Jordan's Islamist movement were "moderate, peace-loving people." He added that he believed that the Muslim Brotherhood and Jordanian officials "can all work as a team."

16. (U) During a meeting June 17 with a parliamentary bloc, Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit denied rumors of an orchestrated campaign to discredit Jordanian Islamists. Stressing that the GOJ had no quarrel with the IAF, Bakhit stated, "Our problem is with the four deputies, who went against our national standards and even Islamic principles, with one of them issuing a fatwa that affects our social security." He asserted that the government would not interfere with the judicial process against the four MPs. Government spokesperson Nasser Judeh rejected criticism by HRW levied at the GOJ, saying that HRW's remarks "were insulting to a lot

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of Jordanians." He continued that the government was not seeking an apology from the organization, "but the families of the Amman (hotel) bombing victims need apology letters from (the HRW)."

POLL FINDS MAJORITY THINK ZARQAWI "TERRORIST"

17. (U) A telephone poll conducted by local NGO Ipsos Stat and published in independent daily Al-Ghad June 19 revealed that 57% of Jordanians surveyed did not believe that Zarqawi was a "martyr," while 59% responded that he was a "terrorist." NOTE: The text of the article said 67% refused to acknowledge that Zarqawi was a martyr, but the corresponding table showed 57%. END NOTE. Asked if paying condolences on the death of Zarqawi was "offensive," 55% responded positively, versus 20% who answered "emphatically not."

18. (C) Although the poll had a margin of error of 3.2%, some contacts expressed skepticism over its reliability. Oreib Rintawi, Director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, told poloff that many Jordanians) particularly when polled over the phone) "know that it's better for them to provide the 'right' answer to such questions." MP Suleiman Abu Ghaith (West Banker, Madaba) said that while most Jordanians continue to fault Zarqawi for the Amman hotel bombings, "they nevertheless view him in the end) like anyone killed by U.S. forces) as a martyr."

COMMENT

19. (C) Post contacts have asserted that many Jordanians) estimates range from several hundred to several thousand) went to the Zarqawi family condolence tent to pay their respects, including an unspecified number of non-IAF MPs and ex-ministers. The GOJ has indicated that it does not

consider the mere visiting of the tent to be a crime, which will make it difficult to successfully pursue charges against three of the four arrested MPs who have so far not been identified as making any public remarks praising Zarqawi. Contacts within Parliament tell us that attempts to expel the four MPs from the legislature "will go nowhere."

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